

*Introduction: Pg. \_\_\_\_*

We all love our cell phones. We can do so many things on our phones, that making phone calls is probably not in the top 5 reasons why you love your phone. But whether you are checking something online, sending an email, hopping on social media, or actually trying to make a call, our phones are only as useful as the service signals that make our phones work. I cannot FaceTime my mom today, on her birthday (Happy Birthday, mom. You're awesome!), unless there is a strong connection with the towers that make our phones work.

Now, we live in a highly favored day. There are well over 200,000 cell towers in the US today, compared to only 900 in 1985. That's quite a leap and at least 5 of those 900 were in Zac Morris' neighborhood in 85'. (Any Saved by the Bell fans out there?) A.C. Slater, Screech, Kelly Kapowski, & Zac who had a cell phone the size of a 4x4.

It is rare that we have connections issues, especially here in Boston, BUT it still happens from time to time, and if it's not on our end, it may be on the end of the person we're trying to reach. For example, I have a new friend who was traveling through the midwest, and I didn't hear from him for a few days, because a series of **massive tornadoes [PIC]** took out towers across Kansas.

I'd take a winter Noreaster, over that, any day.

Here's the point: the connection is essential. "Can you hear me now? Can you hear me now?"

When the connection on our phone gets scratchy, what do you do? Look down and see how many bars are up? And when we can't have a conversation and the bars are low, we might end up looking like this dude right here! It just drives us crazy.

### **PIC of Frustrated Dude**

That's what can happen when our phone connection is bad, but what about when life gets scratchy? What about when our lives are not working like we want them to? I'm not talking about life around us. I'm talking about life within us.

How many bars are up in your soul?

### **"How's Your Connection?" John 15:1-17**

I want to propose to you today that we need to consistently examine our connection to Christ.

**TP: Stay Connected to Christ so HE can Construct a Life that Counts.**

In John 15, as Jesus continues to give his closest followers and friends instructions before his death, we are going to hear him focus in on their connection to him.

*Read 15:1-11*

Jesus pulls out a picture that would have been well known to his disciples. Hundreds of years earlier, God told his people that they were his vineyard (Isaiah 5). Like a good gardener or “vinedresser,” he cared for the vine, protected it, watered it, pruned it, with the expectation that it would yield good fruit/ abundant fruit. Instead, it yielded bad fruit... inedible fruit.

- Pic: I’m really picky about my fruit... bruises, bad spots, I won’t eat it. I’ll throw it out.
- This is why Jesus saying “I am the TRUE vine” is such a radical statement.
  - Where they failed, and to help this hit a little closer to home, where we have failed, Jesus came through.
  - Where we ran away, Jesus ran toward.
  - Where we were faithless, he was faithful.
  - Jesus is the true vine. He is the truly fruitful vine...
- He was perfect in kindness, patience, self-regulation, compassion. In all of his life, he flourished and produced the life God wants us all to live, and he wants us to live in the very same ways through his power at work in us.

T: Let me give you 3 encouragements on what it looks like to stay connected to Christ.

### **I. Stay Connected to Christ for deeper friendship with God and a fruitful life.**

The focus is the relationship between the vine and the branches To translate the analogy: the focus is the relationship between Jesus and people

- Jesus did not establish a religion that asks us to keep a list of rules and perform a number of good deeds in hopes that God might welcome us home.
- Jesus came to establish a relationship that is built off of what he has done. Our acceptance is based on his action.
- Doesn’t that floor you? The God who created every galaxy in the universe wants a vibrant friendship with us.
- And how do we become friends of God? We just open our hands and receive. That’s how we get connected, AND that’s also how we stay connected.
- Look down at verses 12-17
  - He loves us so much that he would die for us.
  - He wants to be so close to us, that he LETS US IN, completely. He holds nothing back. We are in the Know. I don’t even know what to do with that!
  - Does this bring a little perspective? Who gives a rip about how many Facebook friends we have?
  - Who gives a rip about how many likes or loves or wows or RTs, or shares our posts get?
- We have a real relationship with God. This is the greatest privilege we could ever know in life.
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So Jesus sets up this relationship through the analogy of a vine and it’s branches.

Here’s the Progression: **Vine > Branches > Fruit**

- Jesus is the vine. We are the branches.
- The sole purpose of a branch is, what? To produce fruit!
- Bear fruit, bear more fruit (2) Bear much fruit (5, 8) fruit that lasts... (16)
- This is why are we here? Produce godliness, godlikeness and bring more people to God.

- If we want to live a life that counts, a Productive, Fulfilling, Fruitful, then we must stay connected to him.

When we stay close to Christ, we will make a difference, no matter what we're doing, no matter where we are. How amazing would it be for people to say: *This place was different because of their presence.*

- Church
- Home
- Work
- Neighborhood

You want to know if you are abiding in Christ? It's not that hard. Just look at your life. **Galatians 5:22-23 says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law"**

Are these qualities surfacing consistently in your life? Are these qualities increasingly revealed in you?

## II. Stay Connected to Christ by Depending on his Grace

- Know your role. Don't try to do his job. You do your job and let him do his job.
- We all have tried to be someone we're not.
- Worship leader Search (call to prayer): Maybe pick up Micah's guitar tell the story about college learning to play leading worship.
- The consequences of me leading worship would be frustration for me and pain for you. We probably wouldn't exist in two years because no one would want to suffer through the experience.
- It's foolish to try to be someone else. Be who God has made you to be.
- It's whole different ball game when we try to be God.

All of life is Grace... His power is what fuels us.

- Titus 2:11-12
- Colossians 2:6-7
- John 15:5

The Christian life is impossible. If you want to get to London, you can take a flight or swim.

When we flip the script, when we put the cart before the horse, we will end up weary, discouraged, and ready to give up.

- It's not our job to produce the fruit. It's our job to abide.
- And here's the good news...

He is completely committed to making this happen!

- Look at verse 2 "Branch in me"
- Every branch that bears no fruit - he cuts off...
  - How do we explain verse 2? With Verse 6
- Every branch that bears fruit - he cuts back... Why? To bear more fruit.

- In order to “ensure maximum production,” he cuts off the dry and withered branches and cuts back and prunes the smaller branches so they can receive adequate nourishment and grow unhindered.

That’s his job, but what about us. We are instructed to abide, remain, stay, dwell . . .what does that look like?

Sproul: “Jesus declared that our productivity, our fruitfulness, is directly linked to our abiding in Him. As Christians, we will bear fruit, but it will vary in degree. The closer we stay to Christ, the more fruit we will bear. The more we wander out from the center and neglect the means of grace that He has given to us, the less fruit we will produce.”

How do we abide? How can our SOULS Be Cemented to Christ that we might be fruit?

- Talk to him like a friend. PRAYER (Verse 7)
  - Relationships deepen with time.
  - In light of how much he has loved us, now we want to go to him. It’s no chore...
- Receive his WORDs. (Verse 7)
  - Schedule time with God. Have a plan.
  - Retreat... Get away.
  - Fruit Flows when we are Full of Christ. - The Natural Consequence of Staying Connected to Christ... You show me someone displaying kindness, and patience, and selflessness, and I’m just saying: Hmm... they’ve been dwelling with Jesus.
    - You know when I’m the most selfless? When I am closest to the Selfless One.
    - You know when I’m naturally bold? When I am closely connected to Lion of Judah.
    - You know when I’m less phased or unphased by criticism? When I am closely connected to the who who was insulted and spit upon and then died for those same people.
- Live his WORDs by running everything through him.
  - Verse 10: “If we love him, we will keep his commands. It’s not keep his commands to love him, but our following in his ways, reveals that we actually love him.” It’s not obey to build love; it’s love to build obedience.
  - So when we are building our closeness with him, through prayer and we’re filling our minds and hearts with his transforming word, then we are positioning our lives to live under his gracious influence.
  - When we abide in Christ, his love is leading our lives...
- Paul Tripp says it this way in what he calls the Principle of Inescapable Influence: “Whatever rules the heart will exercise inescapable influence over the person's life and behavior.” – Paul Tripp...
- I want to give you a way to understand and seek “**Biblical Change:**” All you need to do is remember these four words (and apply them to your life).
  - **Heat: Our daily situations in life.**
  - **Thorns: Our ungodly response to the situation.** (Excuses- Blame shifting, dysfunctional family, physical weakness)

- **Cross: God's redemptive power to bring change.**
- **Fruit: Our godly response to the situation.**
- This is completely comprehensive... Any situation.
  - Your Car breaks down.
  - Someone says something that rubs you the wrong way.
  - Stuck in traffic.
  - Underperforming at Work. OR Knocking it out of the park at work.
- Heat, Thorns, Cross, Fruit.
- This fruit does not rise and fall on our circumstances but on how we stay connected to the vine. So... you can be in a horrible work situation, or dealing with a three old that [you feel like is going to send you to a mental asylum], or in a very rocky relationship.
- And sometimes we're tempted to believe that it would be very difficult if not next to impossible to live a fruitful, fulfilling life in light of those circumstances, but I'm just telling you that is exactly the place where God delights to his best work in you.
- The only thing that is stopping you is your connection to Christ.
- **"Thus says the LORD: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD. He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land." (Jeremiah 17:5-6)**
- **"Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit."(Jeremiah 17:7-8)**

Finally...

### III. Stay Connected to Christ to make your life Count.

What happens when we stay connected to the Vine...

- New Power to Love (12-13) Love like never before.
- New Joy to Experience (11)
  - The goal of all of these words is their joy. FULL JOY. Not icing. Cake Not supplemental. Substance.
  - Happiness is fragile because it flows from external circumstance.
  - Joy is forever fulfilling because it flows from the eternal Christ.
- New Ability to Glorify God (8)
  - The branch's reason for existence is to show the excellence of what the vine can produce.
  - Do you follow me? We display who God is by how we live our lives.
  - Calvin Miller says, "To live a shabby spiritual life is to make God look like a poor heavenly father."

I'll take that. I'll take that. I'll take that.

*Conclusion:*

What do you want to see happen through your life? It's taken care of if you stay connected to Christ.

**2020 VISION:** Fill the city with the presence of Christ.

2020 is taken care of...

BUILD & CELEBRATE...

2020 Vision - It happens if we get John 15....

Invite newbies into the mix... This is ongoing. We are always going to be adding people, which means we always need to be coming back to this

BEHOLD CHRIST...

Lord's Supper Transition...